

COEXIST WITH *Bats*

Bats are perhaps some of our most misunderstood and under-appreciated wildlife, despite their beneficial role in our environment. These flying mammals are vital in controlling insect populations and can consume nearly their body weight in insects each night! Unfortunately, their nocturnal nature, centuries of myths and misinformation, and negative portrayal in popular media has contributed to needless fear of these creatures and has even led to the decline of numerous bat species. Bat populations in North America are decreasing as a result of White-nose Syndrome, a fungal disease, making prevention of human-related persecution or conflict exceedingly important.

Preventing Problems with Bats

Although bats are an integral component of our environment, occasionally they can become a nuisance species when they interrupt our daily lives by entering homes, schools, or other structures. Here are some useful tips to avoid negative interactions with bats and deal with nuisance issues.

- Prevent bats from entering homes and buildings by repairing damage to siding or other areas of the house that create openings for bats to enter. Use appropriate hardware/materials to prevent access through chimneys, vents, or other structures. For more information go to batcon.org.
- Establish a bat box near your residence to encourage bats to roost somewhere other than your home or shed. Plans for building bat boxes can be found online from numerous websites promoting bat conservation and/or wildlife management. Bat Conservation International has done the most research on bat box construction and placement to increase the chances of bats occupying the box (batcon.org). In general, it is recommended that the bat house be placed on a pole, not a tree, at least 10 feet high in a place that gets seven hours of direct sunlight in the summer. They should also be placed in areas where they will not be frequently disturbed by human activity and where guano accumulation will not be problematic (e.g., away from walkways, children's play areas, etc.).



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If you already have a problem with Bats:

FIND OUT WHERE BATS ARE ENTERING YOUR RESIDENCE.

Station someone outside of your home around dusk to determine where bats are exiting. Do a thorough inspection of all potential entry points such as small holes, cracks in fascia or siding, and spaces around utility conduits. Permanently seal all of the potential entry points while leaving the entry points the bats are using open. Then, install an eviction device that allows the bats to leave but prevents them from re-entering. Some examples include using screening or tubing. For more information and directions go to batcon.org. Avoid closing up holes or installing exclusion devices from May 1 through July 31. This prevents trapping young bats inside that are not ready to leave the roost and still require parental care. Also, it reduces the chance that female bats will get into the living space while trying to reach their pups. Finally, pups may wander as they starve and end up in the living space.

- Never touch or pick up a bat. Although they will not attack unprovoked they will bite in self-defense. If there is a bat in your home and it has not come into contact with a person, use a clear, empty box and a piece of cardboard to capture the bat and release it outdoors.
- If you are bitten by a bat it is extremely important that you seek medical assistance. Rabies is readily prevented by post-exposure vaccination, but is almost always fatal after symptoms appear. Prompt medical attention is essential following a bite by a bat or other mammal. If you are unsure of whether a family member or pet has been bitten, seek the advice of a medical professional such as your primary physician or county health department. If the bat can be safely captured (in a box or can) it should be sent to a laboratory for testing so that expensive rabies treatment can be avoided if possible.
- If you need assistance removing them from your structure, contact a Wildlife Damage Control Agent (a private individual who charges for his/her services). A list of agents in your area is available at ncwildlife.org under "Have a Wildlife Problem".

Bats Quick Facts:

Do bats attack people?

Contrary to popular belief, bats do not attack people or try to get tangled in their hair. Bats are not blind, but, to aid them in hunting at night, they do have sophisticated echolocation systems that allow them to navigate their environment and detect prey. If a bat can locate a mosquito in mid-flight, it is unlikely that they would accidentally fly into a human. Often, people believe they are being attacked when in reality a bat just happens to be foraging for insects near the individual, typically where they have congregated near a light source (e.g. front porch light, street light, etc.).

Don't all bats have rabies?

No. Although all mammals can contract rabies, only 2–4% of all bats tested in NC test positive for the disease. Additionally, even a bat that has rabies will typically only bite a human in self-defense if handled

(as will a healthy bat). It is never recommended that anyone touch or pick up a bat, particularly one that is suspected to be diseased. You cannot get rabies from just seeing a bat, from being in a room with a bat, or from contact with bat guano (feces), urine, or blood.

Are all bats bloodsuckers?

While it is true that there are bats that feed on blood, no bat in North Carolina is a hemovore (animal that feeds on blood). There are three species of vampire bats that exist only from Mexico through South America. Surprisingly, bats that feed on blood do not puncture their victims and suck their blood as popular media suggests. Actually, these bats have specially adapted incisors that slice the skin like a razor blade and which allows them to simply lap up the blood with their tongue.



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